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Nearly 500 retired intelligence officers, some of whom have been engaged in the most secret of spy work, came out of the cold today for their annual convention.

The agents, many of whom operated for decades under false names or double identities, wore name badges. But, as usual, they declined to be specific on what they did, where or when.

It was the eighth annual convention of the Association of Retired Intelligence Officers, now numbering more than 3,000 members of the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, State Department Intelligence and the intelligence branches of the armed forces.

After standing to pledge allegiance and singing the national anthem, the invocation was read by Catholic Father John P. Gigrich.

Gigrich was introduced as a "former member of intelligence," an introduction that leaves more questions than answers."

The priest, with a smile, said he also "did some chaplain's work" while in intelligence.

A panel of experts agreed that Soviet penetration of the United States and intelligence operations were now concentrated on American technology, particularly computers, in addition to military, scientific and political espionage.

Edward O'Malley, in charge of FBI counter-intelligence, said the FBI's program to combat the efforts by the Soviets, Eastern Europeans and other surrogates, "are very aggressive."

He said, the bureau "was spending more resources than ever before" in identifying Soviet and surrogate spies who penetrate U.S. government and other institutions or subvert American citizens to supply information.

"There's a lot of severe damage also being done by the (American) volunteers who walk in" to Soviet embassies and consulates and give secret information.

The motives, he said, were predominantly money. But, revenge by government and intelligence employees against their superiors for being passed over for promotions also was a factor as was coercion or blackmail.

"The KGB (Soviet Secret Intelligence) manual, says Americans can be bought," O'Malley said. "Unfortunately, this is true."

Army Maj. Gen. William Odom, assistant chief of staff for Defense Department Intelligence, said Soviet diplomatic representation in the United States had increased from 347 in 1950 to more than 1,000 today.

In addition, he said, there is the unofficial presence of some 3,000 visiting scientists, exchange students and trade representatives plus freedom of access to 44 U.S. ports by Soviet shipping.

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